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ABSTRACT

This position statement, coauthored by a joint committee composed of members of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National School Boards Association (ASBA), outlines a new cooperative relationship for superintendents and school boards. In light of the challenges that today's superintendents and school boards face, it is necessary that both parties examine their roles and responsibilities. This document describes the work of the joint committee, professional standards for the superintendency, and the governance role of school boards. It also highlights some societal changes that have affected public school governance and administration. Three major factors of the board-superintendent relationship include the nature of policy development and administration; the increasing influence of external factors on local district governance; and the discretionary authority granted to boards by their chief administrators. The specific responsibilities for boards and superintendents are outlined. Effective communication is identified as a key to a successful board-administrator relationship. (LMI)

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ED 371 465

ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

SCHOOL BOARDS AND SUPERINTENDENTS

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A Joint Publication
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and the National School Boards Association

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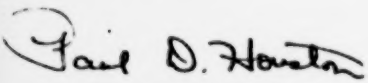
PREFACE

"Working together!" We talk about it. Sometimes we even succeed in doing it. However, too often we pull in opposite directions. It happens in every organization.

Working together is especially important for those who serve our public schools, and the primary example for cooperation should come from the top — the relationship between the school board and the superintendent.

That's why, in 1980, a joint committee made up of members of the governing boards of both the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the National School Boards Association (NSBA) developed the position statement, ***Roles and Relationships: School Boards and Superintendents***. In 1992, the joint governing bodies opened further discussions of the 1980 statement in light of a constantly changing environment and evolving roles and relationships. The position statement contained in this publication was jointly approved in 1994.

This statement is a reflection of the spirit of "working together" that exists between school boards and superintendents. It is our fervent hope that this spirit will carry over into school systems across the nation and will ultimately lead to greater cooperation, increased synergy, and an even better education for the children and adults...all learners...who attend the public schools of our nation.



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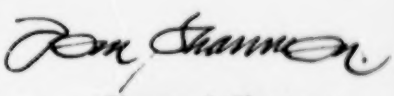

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INTRODUCTION

Profound changes have taken place in public elementary and secondary education during the past few decades. Those who govern and administer our public schools must share a vision, a clear purpose, and the ability and courage to lead.

Realizing that schools alone are unable to meet every need, the board and superintendent must work together to involve families, community organizations, and other public and private agencies for the benefit of the whole child and the entire community.

Recognizing that education is not static, the board and the superintendent must nurture a climate conducive to change. Schools today face vast demographic transitions, expanded technologies, and demands for greater levels of involvement and accountability.

Because the school board is accountable directly to the local community, it must ensure that the superintendent causes the continuous assessment of all conditions affecting education. The board and superintendent must foster the highest possible performance by schools and students through means such as monitoring student achievement, placing program corrections into effect as necessary, keeping the public informed of the status of education programs and progress, ensuring that all teaching and learning fit together harmoniously, providing appropriate staff and board training opportunities, and otherwise fulfilling all governance responsibilities required by state and federal law.

More than 97,000 school board members work with approximately 15,000 superintendents to provide educational leadership for their widely diverse communities. In each of the nation's 15,000 school districts, the board and superintendent serve as key advocates on behalf of their community's students and schools.

Because so much is at stake, it perhaps is inevitable that board members and superintendents each, from time to time, raise questions and concerns about the roles and responsibilities of the other. Some examples might be instructive.

From the superintendent's perspective, some perceive an increase in the number of single-issue board members — that is, those who focus their attention on limited and narrow objectives rather than on helping the entire system move forward. Another concern is the short-term tenure of many school superintendents and what is seen as a diminishing

pool of qualified applicants for these top leadership positions. Turnover among superintendents, especially in the large cities, appears to be escalating at the very time constancy of administrative leadership is more essential than ever to achieving vital policy goals. A third concern is "micromanagement," or the attempt by a board (or one or more of its members) to deal with administrative matters that are properly the administrative responsibility of the superintendent acting within overall policy set by the board, or acting in conformance with state or federal law.

From the school board perspective, some superintendents are seen as endeavoring to control policy direction and school district action by providing insufficient information on issues, attempting to squelch board deliberations, failing to place important policy trends and issues on the board meeting agenda for public discussion, not recognizing the difference between policy and administration because of too broad a view of what the latter entails, and not being evenhanded in dealings with all board members.

Governance Role of Local School Boards

In 1992, the National School Boards Association declared "a four-fold thrust for leadership by local school boards to ensure excellence and equity in public schools." Those four thrusts include (in addition to carrying out governance requirements set forth in state and federal law):

- Working with the community to develop a vision for the schools.
- Establishing a structure and creating an environment that will help the school system achieve its vision and provide students the opportunity to attain their maximum potentials, including working with other local government agencies that serve youth, to ensure that the needs of the whole child are being met.
- Developing accountability through a system of performance standards and assessments that fosters the highest possible student performance.
- Engaging in advocacy on behalf of students and their schools.

How boards and superintendents work together can mean the difference between exhilaration and frustration for both parties and, more important, between success and failure for the students in our nation's public schools. This booklet describes some of the essential roles and relationships so important to good education. When roles are clear and relationships are sound, communities feel a sense of confidence in their school leadership, and ultimately, students in each community and in our nation receive an even better education.

The Work of the Committee

In 1980, a joint committee made up of representatives of the Board of Directors of the National School Boards Association and the Executive Committee of the American Association of School Administrators developed the initial version of ***Roles and Relationships: School Boards and Superintendents.*** In 1992 and 1993, the two representative groups met jointly to develop and adopt this revised edition of a statement that has become basic in defining the work of the top leadership team in America's most vital institution, its public schools.

Professional Standards for the Superintendency

In 1993, the American Association of School Administrators published a report on the professional standards for the superintendency. Developed by the AASA Commission on Standards for the Superintendency and based on years of research, that report set forth what superintendents will need to know and be able to do in the years ahead, in view of our nation's changing demographics, family structures, technologies, and community expectations.

Eight new professional standards were highlighted in the report. One of them — Standard (2) — dealt with policy and governance. That standard relates directly to the roles and relationships of superintendents and school boards. It declares that superintendents "should develop procedures for working with the board of education that define mutual expectations, working relationships, and strategies for formulating district policy for external and internal programs; adjust local policy to state and federal requirements and constitutional professions, standards, and regulatory applications; and recognize and apply standards involving civil and criminal liabilities."

To accomplish this, Standard (2) states that superintendents should "know and be able to: (a) describe the system of public school governance in our democracy; (b) describe procedures for superintendent-board of education interpersonal and working relationships; (c) formulate a district policy for external and internal programs; (d) relate local policy to state and federal regulations and requirements; (e) describe procedures to avoid civil and criminal liabilities."

The other seven standards relate to the wide scope of duties of the superintendent. It is important that school board members as well as superintendents understand such standards, because these standards will affect the expectations school board members have for superintendents and should guide the school board in supporting the superintendents' in-service professional training regimen.

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SOME SOCIETAL CHANGES AFFECTING PUBLIC SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Since 1980, many economic, social, technological, and demographic changes have swept through the country, affecting children and their schools. Some of these changes are reflected in these facts:

- According to the 1990 census, the nation's children were poorer and more diverse than ever before. They were also more likely to have fallen behind in school than they were 10 years earlier.
- The population is aging as the baby boom generation moves toward retirement, creating increased competition for scarce resources. Schools are challenged to determine how to involve, inform, and serve older citizens more effectively than ever before, as well as how to gain support from a voting citizenry that is becoming increasingly distant from school-age young people and the social, educational, and emotional issues they face.
- Federal and state curriculum mandates have multiplied rapidly, and local schools are hard-pressed to present the burgeoning course load without any increase in the amount of time available for instruction. This problem is exacerbated because, all too often, the mandates arrive without adequate funds to carry them out.
- Society expects schools to use already-strained resources to deal with growing social, economic, and health concerns — AIDS, violence, asbestos, and radon, to name but a few.
- Expectations increase that the public schools will provide services for three- and four-year-olds, a growing number of whom are afflicted from birth because their parents use crack cocaine or are infected with AIDS. Many of these children also suffer the devastating effects of abuse and neglect.
- Political pressure has grown for development of national standards and national education performance assessments, with an even greater concern about a possible national curriculum.

- School-finance lawsuits in dozens of states have led to demands that states provide adequate resources to meet all of the education standards the states themselves have set.
- Special interests have amplified the political rhetoric promoting choice and voucher plans, while clouding the real issues impeding the provision of an excellent and equitable educational opportunity for all of our nation's children.
- State legislative programs have sought to reform education by imposing requirements for such programs as site-based management, collaborative decision making, local school councils, shared governance, and teacher empowerment plans.
- Interest has grown in increased collaboration among schools, other units of government, and various community agencies that provide services for children, youth, and families. Schools often become the locus for these integrated services.
- Agencies and organizations have issued reports calling for the reform — and in some cases even the privatization — of school systems.
- Political pressure is mounting to eliminate the federal deficit and, at the same time, expand costly federal and state social programs (such as health care insurance).

ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Joint AASA-NSBA Position Statement

If our nation is to continue to thrive, the constant improvement of public education will be essential. Strong collaborative leadership from school boards and superintendents must be a driving force in dealing with the direct and indirect effects of the great changes and challenges facing society and our nation's schools. Neither board members nor superintendents can operate effectively without a thorough knowledge of and support for the other's role.

It is increasingly important for the board and superintendent to delineate their respective roles.

A superintendent is expected to display excellence as an educational leader, to be politically sophisticated, to be aware of and active in legislative developments, to have an extensive knowledge of federal and state laws, to be an exemplary educator, and to personify effective communication.

A school board is asked to be responsive to its constituencies in governance; sensitive to the special needs of all learners in the district; an active advocate for students and learning before the people of the community as well as before local, state, and federal government bodies; and a vigorous ambassador explaining the role of public education and its programs to all citizens.

The school board is a legal agent of the state and must, therefore, fulfill both state and federal mandates. At the same time, the board must be responsive and accountable to the community it serves. The board is a legislative body that develops, evaluates, and oversees education policies. The superintendent is the professional educator chosen by the board to implement policies and to provide professional leadership for a district's schools. With such vital responsibilities, a sense of teamwork is essential.

In an enterprise as complex as a school district, the line between policy and administration is rarely clear-cut. Nonetheless, harmonious and productive relationships can flourish if two-way communication is established and maintained.

Here are three of the major factors that influence relationships between school boards and superintendents:

1. **The nature of policy development and administration.** Serving as a professional adviser to the school board is one of the superintendent's key roles. Although the board is not bound to accept the superintendent's advice, a prudent board never establishes policy without first consulting the superintendent, its chief professional adviser. In the same vein, the wise superintendent never institutes major administrative procedures without first providing the board an opportunity to review proposed rules for adherence to established policy. Moreover, the board should be given a regular opportunity to review existing administrative procedures to test whether they do conform to such policy.

2. **The increasing influence of external factors on local school district governance.** Legislative mandates, for instance, often allow no latitude for anyone in the local school district to alter detailed rules in implementing new laws or mandated curricula. Similarly, the superintendent sometimes must establish de facto policy by taking necessary action to meet unanticipated but pressing circumstances, thereby creating precedent in an area where the board has no formal written policy.

3. **The discretionary authority boards grant their chief administrators.** The board, by law, generally is responsible for all school programs and operations. Nevertheless, all boards delegate some portion of that authority to the district superintendent. Without sufficient authority delegated from the board, the superintendent's ability to discharge responsibility is diminished. Where to draw the line regarding delegated authority is a matter each board and superintendent must determine individually and should review periodically, but here is one guideline: The board must give the professional school administrator authority to carry out designated responsibilities, and the administrator must give the board assurances that the duties assigned to the job are being carried out.

SCHOOL BOARDS: SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES

Within this general framework, school boards have these specific responsibilities:

- To make clear that the board's primary role is the establishment of policy in furtherance of its function of governance as the epitome of the American institution of representative governance of public elementary and secondary education in our free democracy.
- To work with the superintendent and the community to develop a vision for the schools.
- To establish a structure and create an environment that will help the school system achieve its vision.
- To develop academic standards based on high expectations and an assessment system to measure academic performance toward the achievement of such standards, so that the school board can be accountable to the people of the community.
- To formulate strategies to help students who are not performing up to standards attain their maximum potentials.
- To engage in advocacy on behalf of students and their schools and promote the benefits of a public education system to the community.
- To support the superintendent in all decisions that conform to board policy, other decisions made by the board, or recognized professional standards.
- To hold the superintendent responsible and accountable for the administration of the schools through regular, constructive, written and oral evaluations of the superintendent's work. Performance evaluation is an ongoing effort and should be linked to goals established by the board with the advice and counsel of the superintendent.
- To provide the superintendent with a comprehensive employment contract.
- To provide fair and adequate compensation that will attract and retain excellent people in all circumstances.

- To give the superintendent the benefit of individual board member's expertise, familiarity with the local school system, and community interests.
- To hold all board meetings with the superintendent or a designee present.
- To consult with the superintendent on all matters — as they arise — that concern the school system, and on which the board may take action.
- To develop a plan for board-superintendent communications.
- To channel communications with school employees through the superintendent, especially if any action is suggested, and to refer all applications, complaints, and other communications, oral or written, first to the superintendent. Doing so ensures that such communications can be processed in a coordinated fashion that is responsive to students and patrons.
- To take action on matters only after hearing the recommendation of the superintendent.
- To include in board policies a specific policy on the effective management of complaints against district personnel.
- To provide the superintendent with administrative assistance, especially in the area of monitoring teaching and learning.
- To exercise continued oversight of all education programs.
- To work closely, where appropriate, with other governmental agencies and bodies.
- To collaborate with other school boards through state and national school boards associations to let state legislators, members of Congress, and all other appropriate state and federal officials know of local concerns and issues.
- To mandate and provide resources for high quality board and professional development programs using qualified trainers that will enable school leaders to have the knowledge and skills needed to provide excellent policy leadership for the school system. In some cases, boards and superintendents should engage in joint training.
- To provide for self-evaluation of the board's own effectiveness in meeting its stated goals and performing its role in public school governance.

- To establish a periodic review of all school board policies for current relevance and necessity to ensure student needs are being appropriately served.
- To work to ensure that the district has the necessary funds and that a balance is maintained between needs and resources in the distribution of available monies.
- To delegate to the superintendent responsibilities for all administrative functions, except those specifically reserved to the board's presiding officer through board policy. Those reserved areas include establishing a regular time for the superintendent and the leader of the school board to meet for discussion of school board policy matters and joint preparation of each meeting agenda, conducting board meetings and certain public hearings, approving the agenda and minutes of board meetings, and engaging in other activities related to serving as the presiding officer of the board.
- To ensure board members understand that, under law, the school board acts as a board and that individual board members have no independent authority.

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SUPERINTENDENTS: SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES

In keeping with the division of effort, superintendents have these specific responsibilities:

- To serve as the school board's chief executive officer and preeminent educational adviser in all efforts of the board to fulfill its school system governance role.
- To serve as the primary educational leader for the school system and chief administrative officer of the entire school district's professional and support staff, including staff members assigned to provide support service to the board.
- To serve as a catalyst for the school system's administrative leadership team in proposing and implementing policy changes.
- To propose and institute a process for long-range and strategic planning that will engage the board and the community in positioning the school district for success in ensuing years.
- To keep all board members informed about school operations and programs.
- To interpret the needs of the school system to the board.
- To present policy options along with specific recommendations to the board when circumstances require the board to adopt new policies or review existing policies.
- To develop and inform the board of administrative procedures needed to implement board policy.
- To develop a sound program of school/community relations in concert with the board.
- To oversee management of the district's day-to-day operations.
- To develop a description for the board of what constitutes effective leadership and management of public schools, taking into account that effective leadership and management are the result of effective governance and effective administration combined.

- To develop and carry out a plan for keeping the total professional and support staff informed about the mission, goals, and strategies of the school system and about the important roles all staff members play in realizing them.
- To ensure that professional development opportunities are available to all school system employees.
- To collaborate with other administrators through national and state professional associations to inform state legislators, members of Congress, and all other appropriate state and federal officials of local concerns and issues.
- To ensure that the school system provides equal opportunity for all students.
- To evaluate personnel performance in harmony with district policy and to keep the board informed about such evaluations.
- To provide all board members with complete background information and a recommendation for school board action on each agenda item well in advance of each board meeting.
- To develop and implement a continuing plan for working with the news media.

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COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Communication is essential to creating and maintaining a successful working relationship between the school board and superintendent. Astute school boards and superintendents realize that maintaining sound public relations could mean the difference between success or failure. Sound relations with the citizenry are essential to the long-term survival of public education in each community and in our nation.

School systems are central to the hopes and dreams of the communities they serve, and those communities depend on educated people to secure their futures. In addition to providing valuable education services, schools are major employers, and because of our changing social structure, the schools today often serve as a safe haven for children during the school day, and sometimes before and after school as well.

Because of this important community role, and because a sound program of internal and external communications is required for any democratic institution to acquaint the people of the local community with facts on its schools, the board and superintendent should ensure that an adequately funded public relations plan is in place. Giving the public and members of the school district staff a clear understanding of the contributions of local schools is a key to success.

A program of effective public relations might include these elements:

- Policies that ensure open and honest communications and provide the human and material resources necessary for an effective public relations program.
- Regular formal and informal surveys of community members to determine their opinions, attitudes, and needs.
- Involvement of staff and community members, by such means as advisory groups and parent organizations, at the district and local school sites in the decisions that affect them.
- Publications that regularly carry information, ideas, and opinions to staff and community.
- Identification and tracking of issues, trends, or conditions that could affect the ability of the school system to reach its goals.

- Training on how school people can relate to representatives of the news media, speak effectively in public, write in a way that members of the community can clearly understand, use appropriate listening skills and nonverbal communications techniques, and work effectively in a group.

For the board and superintendent, in their collaborative governance/administration relationship, key elements of the communications program might include at least working toward a sense of high mutual personal regard and respect and developing a sense of trust and openness, a respect for each other's duties, a desire to address misunderstandings promptly, and a willingness to confront differences of opinion without acrimony.

Ultimately, effective communication is the key to understanding, and understanding is essential in our ongoing quest to ensure the best possible education for the students in our schools.

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PUBLIC EDUCATION...THE KEY TO OUR FUTURE

Why are roles and relationships involving school boards and superintendents so important? The answer is clear: Those relationships will have either a positive or negative effect on what happens in the classroom. That's why superintendents and board members must work together effectively.

Nothing less than public education is at stake, and a sound system of public education is essential to the future of our free-market economy and our democratic society.

Our public schools are the foundation of our democracy. They keep hope alive, and they open a world of possibility for our entire society. In fact, our nation has survived and prospered precisely because it is firmly grounded in the concept of equal educational opportunity for all.

The people of America depend on dedicated board members, superintendents, principals, teachers, and others who serve our public schools. How well school leaders work together to ensure the best possible education for each and every student will determine the success of this great institution. Ultimately, the effectiveness of our public schools will determine our ability to sustain a free and democratic society.

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Roles and Relationships: School Boards and Superintendents has been reviewed and approved by the NSBA Board of Directors and the AASA Executive Committee.

Staff members from both NSBA and AASA also were involved in the development of this publication. NSBA Executive Director Thomas A. Shannon and former AASA Executive Director Richard Miller worked directly with the governing boards when they met in joint session. NSBA Associate Executive Director Jeremiah Floyd and AASA Senior Associate Executive Director Gary Marx served as project directors. Editorial assistance was provided by Gregg W. Downey of NSBA. Production was coordinated by Leslie Eckard, AASA publications manager, and Katie Ross, AASA communications assistant. Graphic design was provided by Dahlman/Middour Design of McLean, Va.

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